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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR MOPS IS SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PRESIDENT SLEIMAN'S POST-ELECTION AGENDA

REF: A. BEIRUT 587

1B. BEIRUT 570

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) President Michel Sleiman, in an energetic May 27 speech to mark the anniversary of his first year in office, called for action on a broad domestic agenda, to be led by him if, he implied, the new government is too divided to get anything done. His words and tone previewed a potentially more active presidency after the June 7 election. End summary.

SLEIMAN: YEAR TWO

12. (SBU) President Michel Sleiman celebrated his first year in office at a large dinner in his home district of Jbeil attended by Ambassador and other COMs and a who's who of Lebanese government, politics and business. In his speech at the event, 11 days before Lebanon's election, Sleiman laid out an ambitious agenda for government action post-election. This included calling for proportional representation and a devolution of central power to regions, judicial sector reforms, economic reform, better education and health care, empowering woman in society, granting citizenship to immigrants while rejecting any form of Palestinian resettlement, and reinforcing the security forces. He called for adhering to the legitimate institutions of the constitution while allowing the "democratic game" to takes its course. Noting his effective efforts over the past year in regaining a role for Lebanon in the Arab and international community, Sleiman declared it was Lebanon's duty also to liberate its occupied territories, help achieve peace via the Arab Peace Initiative, and reconcile internal disputes.

3.(C) With parliamentary elections on June 7, and the outcomes still clouded by several "too-close-call" Christian dominated districts, Sleiman's agenda-setting speech highlighted areas on which there likely would be no progress if election results lead to continued gridlock in a new national unity government.

SLEIMAN'S NEW LOOK

¶4. (C) As another possible sign of his new assertiveness, Sleiman a few days before the speech pushed through the cabinet the completion of five remaining appointments to the Constitutional Council (Ref A). The Council is the body that will handle electoral disputes, and the absence of complete membership was a cause of concern among many observers.

Sleiman seemed to acknowledge in his May 27 speech that during his first year, he has worked to be a consensual, impartial, and conciliatory president, but he also dropped clear hints about taking a more assertive role in the future, saying the President has the "obligation to guarantee and ensure" application of the Constitution and "(the President) should have the means to end and decide any dispute."

COMMENT

¶5. (C) It was a mild surprise that Sleiman focused to such an extent in his anniversary speech on the post-election period and his desire to move on a broad government agenda. Former military man Sleiman is frustrated at the slowness and ineffectiveness of the current government and is interested in using his position to get more done, a businessman who advises him on economic matters, Shadi Karam, told DCM on May ¶29. Sleiman "knows the limits" of his office and so is interested in expanding his ability to accomplish things, Karam said, including perhaps gathering a group of MPs or ministers to be close to him. In his speech, Sleiman may have been trying to build support for independent candidates who will support his Presidency on issues that come before

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the government. He also may have been sending a preemptive message to Michel Aoun that the current President is not going anywhere soon. End Summary.

SISON